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ABSTRACT

Empowerment, also referred to as shared decsion making and site-based decision-making, is essential to school reform and to the preparation of students for the changing demands of a global and technological world. This paper describes the role of the principal in facilitating empowerment in the school. The principal is the building leader who structures the climate to empower both teachers and students at the site. Personal characteristics and skills necessary for the principal's success have been identified by writers such as Fiske and Covey, as well as many other researchers. Primary characteristics include honesty, trust, and patience while skills such as communication, problem solving, and modeling are essential for the process. Benefits of empowerment have been linked to improved academic performance and instruction, increased involvement of teachers, and ownership of the decisions. Training and the development of leadership skills are also integral parts of empowerment. Improved communidation and input into decisions lead to better decisions. Empowerment exemplifies a paradigm shift with the decsions made by those working most closely with students rather than by those at the top of the pyramid. The principal is the leader in implementing and supporting empowerment. (Contains 18 references.) (Author)

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EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment, also referred to as shared decision making and site-based decision making, is essential to school reform and to the preparation of students for the changing demands in a global and technological world. The principal is the building leader who structures the climate to empower both teachers and students at the site. Personal characteristics and skills necessary for the principal's success have been identified by writers such as Fiske and Covey, as well as many other researchers. Primary characteristics include honesty, trust, and patience, while skills such as communication, problem solving, and modeling are essential to the process. Benefits of empowerment have been linked to improved academic performance and instruction, increased involvement of teachers and principal, and ownership in the decisions. Training and the development of leadership skills are also integral parts of empowerment. Improved communication and input into decisions lead to better decisions. Empowerment exemplifies a paradigm shift with the decisions made by those working most closely with students rather than those at the top of the pyramid. The principal is the leader in implementing and supporting empowerment.

Empowerment of teachers and principals in the 20th century is a modern-day adaptation of the authority of that one-room school teacher who made the decisions regarding the children and facility under his or her supervision. In to-

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day's schools with the increase in size of teaching staffs and the traditional role of administrators, empowerment is considered a form of restructuring with those working closest to the students making the decisions regarding the instruction of those students. Historically, our public schools have moved from the simple, one room structure to a complex, hierarchical and bureaucratic structure with many decision-making levels to a flatter structure where decision making becomes more participatory in nature. The latter decision-making model involves the empowerment of teachers. This empowerment may occur upon two levels: within the classroom and within the building or site. Both of these levels are inextricably linked to the role of the building principal. The building principal, functioning as the instructional leader and as the building manager, must adapt to and facilitate the changing power structure. The principal is the key player in establishing the building vision, the trust, and motivation necessary for such collaboration within the classroom and at the site.

The majority of today's schools are organized in a structure emulating the scientific management principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor. His basic theme was that managers should study work scientifically to identify the one best way to perform a task. Fiske (1991) described schools as 19th century models whose purpose was to "turn out a few well-trained thinkers" and large numbers of ordinary workers with the knowledge and skill to do their own jobs. The industrial model trained workers to do factory, assembly line jobs which required little thinking. The emphasis was on being very disciplined and having the fortitude to stand on the assembly line and repeat the same procedure time after time. Consequently, classrooms took on the appearance of these assembly lines, with most of the students working on the same types of activities and skills day after day. These activities and skills were often based upon rote learning with little consideration or encouragement given to problem solving or creative thinking. The similarity between the industrial model and the structure of schools extended beyond the classroom and the educational process.

A second aspect of the industrial model was the pyramid organization, a top-down hierarchy. Dolan (1991), a labor-management consultant, purports that the pyramid functions by putting people in charge at the top and giving them the authority and responsibility to control the human and technical systems below. Other characteristics of the pyramid include communications based upon a *need to know* philosophy, an isolated leadership which receives little or no input from the other layers of the pyramid, and a short-term crisis-oriented view which focuses upon immediate output and problems without long range goals and visions. The rewards and punishments of this system focus on extrinsic motivators with little concern for intrinsic motivators such as loyalty, caring, and job satisfaction (Dolan, 1991). Within the hierarchy the parameters of specific jobs were strictly and narrowly defined.

The role of the building principal was defined within the hierarchy. The principal's duties were to implement the directives which he or she received from higher levels of the hierarchy. Within that framework the principal was isolated both from higher levels and from the level beneath the principalship, the teachers. This model

led to a structure which rewarded those who maintained the status quo. The principal followed the *need to know* philosophy in communicating with teachers. He or she also modeled the top-down decision making process at the building level providing teachers with little or no opportunity for input in the decision making process. Problems or concerns brought to the principal were filtered before being passed up the ladder to ensure that the principal was in no way seen as negligent or ineffective.

Both within the industrial and/or corporate world and in the world of public education, a need for change has occurred. Studies and reports have documented the inadequacies of both systems in a global and technological society. An understanding of this documentation is essential in order to assess the proposed systemic changes. Fiske (1991) cited the federal report in 1983, *A Nation At Risk*, which warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people." Graduation rates, the percentage of students who complete college, and the number of students with substandard reading and math skills are examples of statistical information which document significant problems in our educational system. Business leaders are blunt in their criticism of the problems resulting from educating according to the old model. Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., of RJR Nabisco, Inc. has stated, "Every corporate chief in the country now faces an annual crop of entrants to the labor force that every year contains a higher proportion of functional illiterates . . . (resulting in) lost customers, poor product quality, lost shipments, and garbled paperwork" (Fiske, 1991). As a result of the changing employment structure, the under-or-uneducated worker is creating an economic situation where the gap widens between the *haves* and the *have-nots*. The jobs of this decade and the future require workers to use their heads, not their hands (Fiske, 1991). Workers who are required to think need an education which schools as previously structured did not provide. All students can and must learn in order to have job security and to provide a stable economy for this country.

What changes are needed to accomplish this paradigm shift in public education? The system cannot follow the old model in preparing students for life in a society where the old model is becoming an anachronism. As in industry and in the corporate sector, the education system must look to the empowerment of the workers, those who work most closely with the product, in this case, students. Thus the pyramid must be reversed with the decision making occurring at the bottom. The argument can certainly be made that in this new model, the roles of principals and teachers are greatly expanded.

Many corporate management strategists talk with great enthusiasm about the proven value of empowerment. Yet what exactly is the definition of empowerment? Wellins, Byham, and Wilson (1991) indicate empowerment occurs when power goes to employees who then experience a sense of ownership and control over their jobs. Byham and Cox (1988) stated empowering employees involves helping them take ownership of their jobs so that they take personal interest in improving the performance of the organization. According to McKenna (1990), empowerment is a building

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of personal self-esteem, and possibly the motivation for the worker to further his/her training and education. Wellins et al. (1991) indicated an organization empowers its people when it enables employees to take on more responsibility and to make use of what they know and can learn. In essence, a more empowered work force is a more productive work force.

Although these definitions of empowerment have emerged from the corporate world, the concept of teacher empowerment parallels employee empowerment in a business. Bolin (1989) defined empowerment as investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach. Lucas, Brown, and Markus (1991) defined teacher empowerment as a function of the readiness of building-level administrators to share their autonomy with those whose commitment is necessary to make the educational program function at the highest degree of efficiency. Lee (1991) shared this outlook by defining teacher empowerment as the development of an environment in which the teachers act as professionals and are treated as professionals. He further explained that empowerment means that school authorities provide teachers with the authority to make decisions that have, in traditional systems, been made for them, a time a place to work and plan together during the school day, and a voice in efforts to deepen their knowledge and improve their teaching

Teacher empowerment emerged as a product of educational reform activities that began in the early 1980s. Erlandson and Bifano (1987) declared teacher empowerment has its roots in the literature on teacher dissatisfaction, autonomy, professionalization, and shared decision making. Empowerment was seen as a way to put teachers at the center of the reform movement, to keep good teachers in education, to entice new teachers into the profession, and to reverse a general trend toward treating them as employees who do specific tasks planned in detail by other people

As school organizations move toward the concept of empowerment, many aspects of the organization undergo change. In traditional districts, the organizational structure is formal, hierarchical and well-defined; in an empowered culture, the organization will have a tendency to be more informal, flatter and oriented toward groups and/or teams.

The role and leadership style of the school administrator changes as well as the organization embarks on its journey toward the concept of empowerment. The traditional role of the school administrator stresses direct management control, clear lines of authority and decision making, and a top-down leadership orientation. With empowerment, the management role is positioned as a coach and a facilitator, and the leadership style must be participative. Where information flow was once controlled and limited in a traditional organization, the empowered organization uses an open communications structure. Unlike in the traditional situation where it is the sole responsibility for the administration to plan, control, and dictate school improvements, in an empowered circumstance, the teacher (or teachers) initiate the improvements to be undertaken and share the responsibility for the planning and controlling the activi-

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ties that follow. Granted, for the school program to achieve empowerment for all stakeholders, the leadership at the building site must be in complete support of the concept of empowerment and willing and able to model empowerment.

Many variables affect the implementation and success of empowerment. The factors that directly influence the success of empowerment according to Kirby, Wimpelberg, and Keaster (1992) included the professionalization of the teacher's role, the composition and perceptions of the teaching staff, the personality and characteristics of the principal, and the managerial expectations of the school district. Each of these variables interact and play a role in the success of empowerment. Each must be considered carefully prior to and during the transition to an empowered faculty.

Kirby et al. (1992) professed that this impulse called empowerment, if not carefully, cautiously, and patiently massaged by the school with full awareness of district, school, and individual constraints, will fade. Lucas et al. (1991) stated that attempts to restructure the current decision process or change the administrative culture of decision making will require time and interventions that differ significantly from current practice. The notion of shared vision, cooperative goal setting, and strategic planning seem to have the greatest promise of success.

Four characteristics of principals who have succeeded with shared decision making have been identified in a North Carolina study (Peel & Walker, 1994). Principals who are most supportive of teacher empowerment share these four characteristics: strong commitment, willingness to take risks, willingness to communicate, and an awareness of potential problems. They further explained that change is a complex process which occurs over time, encounters obstacles, and requires patience and commitment. The positive, visible commitment of the principal carries the process ahead. The principal models and encourages risk taking; teachers see this and are empowered by example and encouragement to propose and try new ideas. The third component for success, communication, establishes an atmosphere of shared information and collaboration based upon agreed ground rules and the ability to agree to disagree. They purport this added greatly to the teachers' sense of empowerment and their willingness to tackle tough decisions.

A successful principal is also aware of the potential problems inherent in change and in this process. A principal needs to measure progress in months and years, not necessarily in days and weeks. He or she should include staff members in identifying problems, and using the successful solutions as incentives toward moving forward to larger and more complex issues or problems. Peel and Walker (1994) maintained the principal must have continual involvement in the process.

Some further insight into leadership characteristics and conditions which foster empowerment were provided by Covey (1990). The first condition is a win-win agreement. Covey (1990) stated the win-win agreement is the psychological contract between the manager (principal) and the employee (teacher). He believed that it represents a clear mutual understanding and commitment regarding expectations in five

areas. Those areas are desired results, guidelines, resources, accountabilities, and consequences. In relation to the field of education, this involves the principal and the teacher in mutual agreement and discussions related to student achievement, curriculum, budgets, and outcomes. The win-win agreement may involve two individuals, a group, or team. Once the agreement is in place, Covey (1990) recommended self-supervision. Individuals involved in the agreement evaluate themselves In this instance, the manager or principal acts as a resource or facilitator in helping the individual or team evaluate themselves. Covey (1990) also identified character traits that are critical to the success of the win-win agreement and the climate for empowerment. These traits are integrity (habits congruent with values, words with deeds, expressions with feelings), maturity (courage balanced with consideration), and the abundance mentality (there is plenty out there for everybody). Interrelated to the character traits are three critical skills. Covey (1990) identified these skills as communication, planning and organization, and synergistic problem-solving. Covey's plan has somewhat of a universal application to either business or education.

Many variables affect the implementation and success of empowerment. According to Kirby et al. (1992) the factors that directly influence the success of empowerment include the professionalization of the teacher's role, the composition and perceptions of the teaching staff, the personality and characteristics of the principal, and a critical variable is the managerial expectations of the school district. Each of these variables interact and play a role in the success of empowerment. Each must be considered carefully prior to and during the transition to the concept of empowerment.

Kirby et al. (1992) professed if not carefully, cautiously, and patiently cultivated school-by-school with full awareness of district, school, and individual constraints, this impulse called empowerment will fade. Lucas et al. (1991) stated attempts to restructure the current decision process or change the administrative culture of decision making will require time and interventions that differ significantly from current practice. The notion of shared vision, cooperative goal setting, and strategic planning seem to have the greatest promise of success.

Troen and Boles (1988) pointed out that the Rand Corporation, in its latest report, concluded that 10 years of changes to improve teaching have produced an awesome amount of legislation, but left unsettled the issue of whether teachers are professionals or semi-skilled workers. They further state the only way to make teaching a real profession is to alter substantially the job description and the work life of the teacher.

Kavina and Tanaka (1991), in their review of the *Carnegie Task Force on Teaching As a Profession* that was published in 1986, revealed that teacher empowerment was viewed as a more intensive professionalization of the teacher's role. It was one method to help create a more professional environment, freeing teachers to determine how best to meet the educational needs of their students.

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Maeroff (1988b) defined teacher empowerment as the power to exercise one's craft with quiet confidence and to help shape the way the job is done. Defined here, teacher empowerment would equate to a term synonymous with professional realization.

Empowerment is perceived as a vehicle to expand the professional role of the teacher. It has been dubbed as the catalyst for increased responsibility, authority, and expanded professional growth.

Much of the literature on teacher empowerment revolves around the dissatisfaction experienced by teachers today. The research outlined by Erlandson and Bifano (1987) declared some of the factors that contribute to teacher disillusionment and frustration are (a) lack of teacher input into decisions, (b) administrative decisions that undermine their professional judgment and expertise, (c) absence of the opportunity to exchange practices with colleagues, and (d) lack of recognition for their accomplishments. According to Stimson and Appelbaum (1988), teachers too often complain that they are powerless–that they are at the end of the pipeline in which they are told what and when to teach and test, with virtually no input. Maeroff (1988a) indicated what teachers desire is to have their voices heard and heeded. They want their opinions reflected in the policies of the school and of the district; they want influence.

The empowerment research agrees the conditions under which teachers work are often set up in such a way as to deny teachers a sense of efficacy, success, and self-worth. There is often too much isolation and surviving on one's own. Many forms of professional interaction among teachers reveal that they are really quite superficial and brief, falling far short of genuine collegial collaboration. Sprague (1992) contended that one strong theme in the empowerment literature is the need for teachers to break out of their isolation and discover their shared condition.

Troen and Boles (1988) agreed that teachers must be provided with sufficient time for reflection on educational practices, and opportunities for meaningful dialogue and decision making at the building level. For a teacher to remain vital, engaged, and committed to teaching, opportunities for professional growth must be made available.

Empowerment is often viewed as this avenue for professional growth and renewal. The use of faculty empowerment often results in enabling teachers to work directly with one another instead of in competitive isolation. This corroboration can be organized so that members can discuss pertinent issues, plan curricula with colleagues and stimulate teachers to interact in meaningful ways during the school day. Teachers must be allowed to take an active part in providing direction for their own professional growth and the growth of their school through decision making. Stimson and Appelbaum (1988) stated that empowerment encourages people at all levels of the organization to be involved in decision making without feeling manipulated

Maeroff (1988b) contended empowerment becomes inevitable when teachers have so much to offer and are so sure about what they know that they can no longer

be shut out of the policymaking process. An empowerment program allows the faculty to pursue something that is interesting, intellectually stimulating, invigorating, and professionally enhancing.

Kirby et al. (1992) indicated principals' varying styles, ideologies, and contextual constraints affect their success in implementing school improvement projects based upon faculty empowerment. A principal's degree of experience and comfort with participative decision making may impose resistance to the shared decision making philosophy of teacher empowerment. Teacher decision making and problem solving can be circumvented by the principal who is unaccustomed to relinquishing control. Kirby et al. (1992) further stated that principals who feel the need to maintain such tight control over decision processes often rationalize that they do so because central office administrators want a strong and assertive person in charge. Others simply lack confidence in their staff's ability to assume responsibility for school planning.

It is often asserted that the concept of teacher empowerment would seem to rob the principalship of its central responsibilities for management of the school and its instructional leadership. Erlandson and Bifano (1987) stated research on teacher empowerment clearly indicates that greater responsibility in the hands of teachers for the shape and delivery of educational strategies can, in effect, extend the principal's power by bringing expanded resources to the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the instructional program. Maeroff (1988a) stated that empowering teachers need not mean that principals cease to be in charge, but it should mean that principals engage in more consultation and collaboration.

Kavina and Tanaka (1991) concurred that many principals felt that democratic and open styles were well suited to increased participation by teachers. These principals believed teacher empowerment has not reduced their control, power, or decision-making capabilities.

According to Kirby et al. (1992), the political realities of school systems dictate that district level commitment be secured before pursuing innovative approaches to school improvement such as faculty empowerment. It is equally important to assess the school corporation's long-term needs; this includes the role and importance of empowerment within this context. It is essential that the school corporation's vision, mission, and values are sufficiently clear and compatible to enable empowerment to operate.

School corporations almost always make a number of changes as empowerment is given to teachers. Sprague (1992) stated that how empowering collaboration among teachers ultimately turns out depends on whether school districts are structured to encourage it. Such efforts required more than tokenism, they require strong administrative support, wide recognition, and perhaps most significantly, reduction of instructional demands to make time for genuine collaborative work among teachers. Frequently, additional training as well as new and improved resources are essential to

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make empowerment successful. These integral pieces often only the school corporation can supply.

Although each empowerment circumstance is unique, commonality exists and there are appropriate prerequisites to empowerment. Kavina and Tanaka (1991) in their study of Nevada schools indicated environments conducive to teacher empowerment consist of a high locus of instructional control by the teacher, an open and cooperative organizational climate, available and accessible staff development programs, a positive administrative posture toward new educational methodologies, freedom from mundane tasks, a clear vision of school purpose, prevalence of defined educational standards, and a community perception of teachers as professionals.

According to Lee (1991), to achieve empowerment, teachers need a willingness to develop collegial relationships with teachers in other specialties and with administrators, to help other teachers in setting school policies and procedures, to reflect on and to discuss with others the larger purposes of education in society, to develop better communications skills, to understand better the purpose and sequential nature of their subject areas, and to change and adjust as our schools and communities change.

Byham and Cox (1988) provided the following environmental factors that increase the likelihood of employee empowerment: responsibility for contribution, trust, being listened to, teams, solving problems as a team, praise, recognition for ideas, knowing why you are important to the organization, flexible controls, direction (clear result areas, measurements, and goals), support (approval, coaching, feedback, encouragement), resources readily available, and upward as well as downward communications.

Paramount is the role a principal plays in faculty empowerment. It is essential that a principal creates an environment conducive to empowerment, demonstrates empowerment ideals, encourages all endeavors toward empowerment, and applauds all empowerment successes.

All organizations face the challenge of changing leadership roles as they move toward empowerment. Principals must demonstrate their commitment to these changes. It is the principal's task to empower himself or herself and to create conditions under which others can do the same. Lee (1991) pronounced an effective leader as one who provides a vision, inspires others to commit to that vision, and creates strategies that move them toward the vision.

The principal must conduct all faculty interactions with a leadership style that is in concert with empowerment. Byham and Cox (1988) provided the following situational guidelines to administrators for empowering employees: maintain the faculty's self-esteem; in conversation, listen and respond with genuine empathy; ask teachers for help in solving problems (seek ideas, suggestions, and information); and offer help without taking responsibility. Erlandson and Bifano (1987) showed the body of research on teacher empowerment seems to give two additional pieces of advice to the principal which are: structure the school organization in such a way that hierar-

chical differences are diminished and teachers have professional autonomy and genuine collegial involvement in decisions, and proceed with caution since not all teachers are prepared to assume such a collegial relationship.

Faculty with little experience in collective decision making are often skeptical of such approaches, according to Kirby et al. (1992). Principals must spend a great deal of time nurturing the concept of empowerment as well as nurturing the resultant empowered teachers. Modeling empowered behavior sets the stage for enhanced teacher empowerment. Principals embracing empowerment must lead through example, demonstrating these ideals and realizing that sharing responsibilities with teachers does not mean abandoning responsibilities. It is essential that principals understand what is going on, set the direction, keep the faculty on the right course, offer a guiding hand and an open door to clear the way, and assess progress and performance.

According to Kavina and Tanaka (1991), teacher empowerment promotes the principal as one who strives to support teachers in improving classroom performance through a facilitative stance. The principal working with empowered teachers sees the teachers as the locus of instructional control with regard to determining curriculum content, selecting textbooks, identifying formal and informal measures used to assess student progress/achievement, writing curricula, selecting instructional resources, and determining effective teaching practices tailored to meet student needs. The professional autonomy of teachers is furthered when they are actively involved in determining staff development needs and consistently given the opportunity for professional development.

The most effective principals are those whose teachers have ownership in the mission of the school and a vital interest in its effectiveness. Lucas et al. (1991) stated that the more power that is given away, the more powerful the leader becomes; leaders who create leaders are more powerful than those who do not.

Principals should remember that empowerment is evolutionary, not revolutionary. They should not expect to create an empowered staff in a short period of time. Principals should catch their teachers doing something right and applaud these successes.

The benefits associated with teacher empowerment are numerous; increased job satisfaction, expanded job commitment, improved collegial relationships, expanded individual autonomy, enhanced classroom performance, augmented professional growth opportunities, and increased teacher self-respect are only a few.

Erlandson and Bifano (1987) stated that the research clearly demonstrates that the empowerment of teachers has a positive impact on their professional image, on their commitments to the mission of the school, and on their decisions to remain in teaching.

Stimson and Appelbaum (1988) stated that empowerment or power-sharing encourages people at all levels of the organization to be involved in decision making. This involvement engenders increased commitment to the organization, along with

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greater self-respect on the part of the faculty. When teachers are involved in those decisions that affect them, they are likely to be more satisfied with the job situation and with their principals. Lee (1991) added that mounting evidence from a wide variety of organizations has demonstrated when individuals have a say in how their jobs are designed, when they are involved in making decisions about how their work is conducted, they are more effective.

Fiske (1991) presented specific examples of successful sites where administrators have empowered school personnel and developed shared decision making. The Dade County School System in Florida was the first to decentralize on a large scale. The impetus for change resulted from the cooperation and collaboration between the school personnel and the teachers' union management. Decentralization resulted in more decision making placed at the site and shared decision making at the site with the empowerment of both teachers and the principal. A principal at South Miami Middle School gives site-based management the credit for test scores which have stayed above the national average during four years of challenges which included 40% growth, an increase of minority students from 65% to 75% of the population and the transition from a junior high school concept to the middle school concept. Ownership in the decisions made, he felt, was one of the major reasons for the success of shared decision making.

With the influx of criticism from the public as to how public schools are failing, it is imperative that administrators investigate new ways to enhance the profession of teaching by providing enough challenge and variety. Empowerment is only one way to give new meaning to this process and to renew the teaching force in ways that persuade both the best veterans and the most promising prospects that teaching can be a lifelong career. There is no better way of doing this than by giving teachers the power to do their jobs as well as they can.

The successful schools will be the ones where leaders are best able to apply the creative energy of teachers toward constant improvement. An effective approach to adopt constant improvement as a way of life is through empowerment. Teachers can be uplifted through empowerment; this encouragement will allow them to flex those muscles that perhaps have been allowed to atrophy.

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